

Members of Congress are rarely off the clock, whether they're in their home districts, in the capital or campaigning. But for **Rep. John Campbell**, there's one place he can get away from all things politics: a car show.

The California Republican recalls that at one such event, a man approached him and identified himself as a constituent. "He said, 'You're my Congressman!' And I said, '**Actually, today I'm just a guy with a Riviera.**'"

That would be a 1973 Buick Riviera, just one among **Campbell's** 18-car fleet of vintage cars he keeps back in California.

The collection also includes a 1976 Bicentennial Cadillac Eldorado convertible, a sky-blue 1957 Thunderbird, a 1989 Ferrari 328 GTS and 1970 Buick Gran Sport convertible.

Campbell, who owned several car dealerships before running for office, began amassing cars after he left the business in 2003. The hobby reflects a lifetime love of four-wheeled machines, a passion that began when he was a kid and continued throughout his career — but one he's only been able to indulge relatively recently.

"When I was in the car business, I only drove what I sold," he said. **"Now I'm free, and I can get whatever I want."**

His first buy was a 1960 Corvette, and from there, the vehicular menagerie grew. Many of the cars are valuable collector's items. Some, however, have deeply personal meanings for the Congressman.

He is currently restoring a 1977 Buick Riviera, which isn't typically a collector's car. But for **Campbell**, the car, which he recently bought from a high school friend, brings back memories. He and his buddies were car-crazy even as teenagers, and the Buick is a relic of their youth.

“Of all the cars any of us owned, it’s probably the last one I would have kept if I had my druthers,” he says. “But that car is the only one that survived.”

Closest to his heart is a 1936 Cord just like the one his late father once owned. He attributes his own passion for automobiles to his father, who took pride in driving cutting-edge cars. The stylish and low-sitting Cord was the first of its era to use front-wheel drive.

Although **Campbell’s** father died in 2006, the Congressman keeps him close: The background on his iPhone is a black-and-white photo of his father, Alexander, with his then-new Cord.

“He would say, ‘Cars today — there ain’t nothing like a Cord. That was a car,’” **Campbell** said, affecting a grumpy, older man’s voice.
“[Mine] is just like his.”

Although the Riviera and the Cord have sentimental worth, some of his cars are actually very valuable. **Campbell** won’t reveal how much his collection is worth, but the car rarest among them is a 1958 Cadillac Edorado Brougham, of which only 704 were ever made. It was the most expensive car in the world in 1958. The average price in 2009 was north of \$90,000.

“Sinatra had two, John Wayne had one,” Campbell said. **“It was a who’s who of the rich and famous.”**

Campbell, who won’t choose a favorite car, admits to driving the Brougham more than some of his other vehicles. In fact, he aims to drive each of his cars at least once every 90 days, but he has trouble keeping up when he spends so much time in Washington, D.C.

“I’m here so often,” he said. “I miss them.”

Because he especially misses his 1957 Thunderbird, he has plans to bring the car to Washington next month. He normally drives a 1999 Ferrari 550 Maranello or a 2006 Porsche 911 around the capital.

Besides keeping him from his cars, **Campbell's** political career has had another effect on his collection. In the back window of every car in his collection is a Republican bumper sticker from a campaign that matches the year of the car. On his '57 Thunderbird is a Richard Nixon campaign sticker, and on his '66 Mustang is a sticker to elect Ronald Reagan governor of California. A Reagan sticker also decorates his 1970 Buick GS.

The political bumper stickers in his windows mark **Campbell** as no ordinary car collector. Unlike many who leave the washing and waxing of their precious cars to the professionals, he likes to get his hands dirty.

Campbell, a University of Southern California Trojans fan, loves nothing more than turning on the football game in the driveway and working on his cars. A complete detailing job might take 10 hours, but **Cam**

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doesn't seem to mind.

"I'm no mechanic," he said. "But I can make the paint on a car shine as good as anybody."